



THE YORK
HANDBALANCING
Course No. 2

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BEFORE GOING INTO the one hand balances there are a number of other handstands that will test your proficiency. If you have followed Course #1 carefully then the following stunts will not only be easy but will add a lot of fun to your balancing session.

The 'Chair-stand' is one such stunt and is an old favorite with professional performers. Use an ordinary kitchen chair but make certain that it is strong and has a very sturdy back. Place one hand around the front edge of the chair and the other on top of the chair back (see Fig. 1, Page 2.). Lean well forward and with a slight jump draw the legs up close to the body and from this position press up into your handstand.

You will find that you have unusual power and control in the arm that is grasping the back of the chair and many equilibrists say that the balance is much easier than the regular press-up but that it takes more nerve, your head being some forty or fifty inches from the floor.

Later you should try some balances on high parallel bars in order to accustom yourself to balances on high objects. I have seen many a good man fail to execute a balance on some high object, although on the ground he was excellent, merely because of fright of the high place or simply lack of nerve. To relate a humorous incident; not so long ago one of our team, an expert balancer in the gym, was coaxed to attempt his handstand on the end of the spring-board at our swimming pool with all his clothes on...he fell in, yet the balance to him was so absurdly simple but the hazard of the water below

him so unnerved him that he improperly performed his balance. Then I have seen average balancers perform at great heights doing things really dangerous without the slightest fear.

Handbalancing does, however, build your nerve and having nerves of steel may serve you well in an emergency some day.

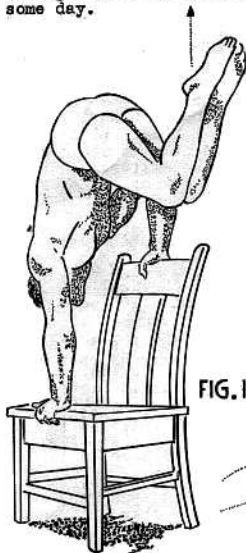


FIG. 1

THE STRADDLE HANDSTAND is a good variation of the press-up for you to try at this stage. Spread your feet about forty to fifty inches apart (depending on your height) and place your hands on the floor approximately between the feet and about shoulder width apart (Fig. 2). Lean well forward, the thighs against the insides of the upper arms and lift the feet off the floor. Without bending the knees but moving entirely from the hips, raise the legs overhead. Complete the balance by bringing the feet together.

LEAN WELL
FORWARD

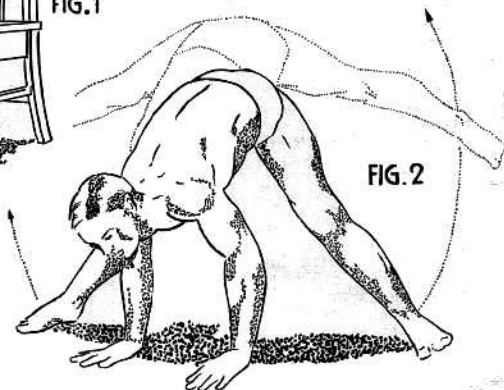


FIG. 2

THE NEXT BALANCE you should learn is the 'stiff-legged lever-up' with arms bent. This is a tough one but should be thoroughly mastered because of its excellent strength building qualities.

Place the hands on the floor about shoulder width apart and bring the feet as close to the hands as you can without bending the knees (see Fig. 3A, Page 4). Lean very far forward allowing the elbows to bend until feet come off the floor (Fig. 3B, solid lines). The raising of the legs takes place entirely from the hips (Fig. 3B, dotted lines on Page 4 show legs partly raised) and the legs remain straight during the entire movement. When the legs are overhead (Fig. 3C) the arms are straightened out as in the regular press-up to handstand. This is a beautiful stunt when performed smoothly and slowly; incidently, the slower you do it the harder it is. When you have mastered this stunt you are ready for the 'Stiff-Arm-Stiff-Legged-Lever-Up.

YOU WON'T FIND MANY chaps who can do this lever-up. It takes plenty of strength and flexibility. The starting position for the stiff-arm-stiff-legged is shown on Page 5, Fig. 4A. Lean well forward, keep the elbows straight at all times and bring the feet as close to the hands as possible without bending the knees. The closer you can get your feet to your hands the easier the stunt. Keep leaning forward until the feet leave the floor (as indicated by the solid lines in Fig. 4B, Page 5) and continue to raise the legs (Fig. 4B, dotted lines) from the hips only. As your feet come into the vertical position (Fig. 4C) you will have to draw your shoulders and head back (that is; come back from the extreme forward position) until the complete handstand has been secured. You must have perfect control throughout the entire movement.

Should you notice undue strain on the wrists then try this stunt for a time on the floor-bars. You will learn the control quite well this way but you are not considered accomplished until you can perform it on the floor.

An interesting exercise, one that will give you strength and co-ordination, is to endeavor to stop and maintain a balance at any one of the positions between the floor (starting position) and the finished handstand.

THE "STIFF-LEG LEVER-UP"

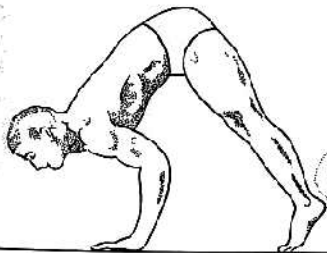


FIG. 3A

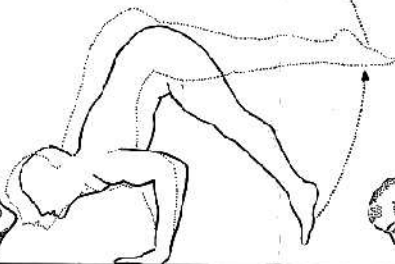


FIG 3B

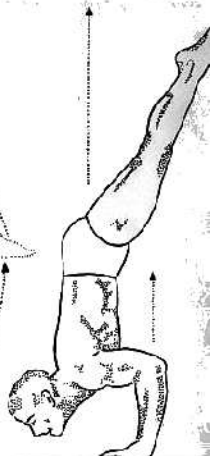


FIG 3C

THE "STIFF ARM STIFF LEGGED LEVER UP"

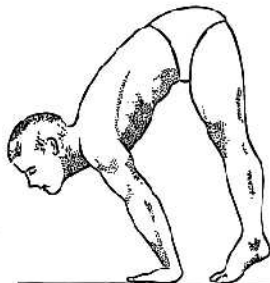


FIG 4A

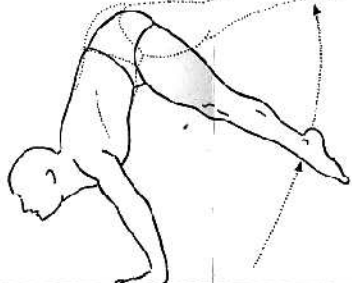


FIG 4B

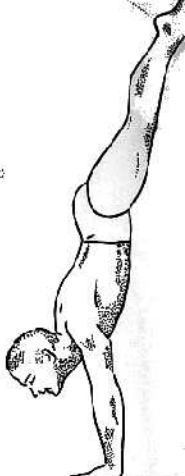


FIG. 4C

AN INTERESTING STUNT is the 'Rock-up' to handstand. If you have mastered the movements of the preceding course you will find this very simple but, in spite of its simplicity, it is a graceful handstand when properly executed.

Lie prone (face down) on the floor, place the hands a few inches below the Pectoral muscles and from this position press the arms out straight keeping the lower part of the body, from the hips to the feet, flat on the floor as shown in Fig. 5A on Page 7. Hold the head well back. From this position snap the head forward and downward at the same time rocking the curved chest on the floor and raising the legs (Fig. 5B solid lines). When the legs reach the position shown by the dotted lines (Fig. 5B) press up into the vertical position (Fig. 5C) arrest the rocking motion and continue to press up into the completed handstand.

The legs should be kept as straight as possible throughout the entire movement but while learning you may have to bend the knees slightly. (About the amount shown in the diagrams on Page 7). There is a little secret to this stunt; quickly flexing the thigh muscles causes the legs to 'bounce' off the floor.

THE 'ROCK-UP' is a good preliminary to the more difficult 'Prone-up' or 'Hollow-back Press-up'. The 'Prone-up' is performed by, first, lying prone (face down) on the floor and placing the hands on the floor in line with the hips. (About six inches farther back than the position shown in Fig. 5A on Page 7). The legs are then raised by arching the back but the chest remains on the floor. By sheer strength you continue arching and raising the legs until they are high enough to permit the chest to be pressed free of the floor. From this position you press up as you would in the regular press up.

In the 'Prone-up' it is difficult to show just how much arch is required and the exact position to place the hands as each handbalancer is constructed anatomically different, but should you master the 'Prone-up' you may well consider yourself an expert balancer.

THE "ROCK-UP" TO HANDSTAND

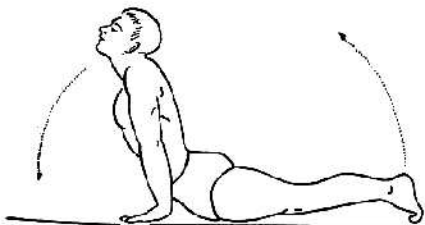


FIG. 5A

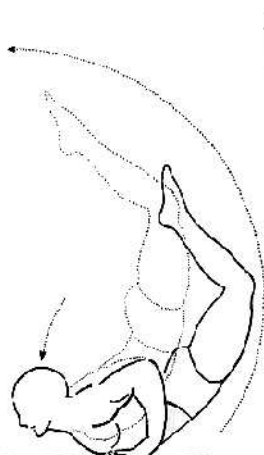


FIG. 5B

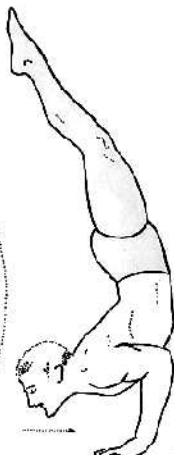


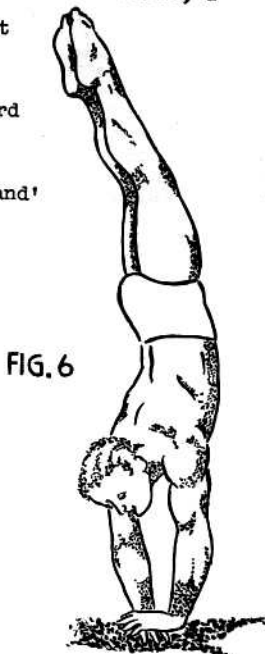
FIG. 5C

"THE HAND-ON-HAND" balance is neat and if you learn this it will go a long way toward making your 'One-Handstand' easier. First, I suggest that you practice a few handstands by kicking up both feet at the same time. Start as you would the regular 'Press-up' but with the feet much farther away from the hands. Lean well forward and spring up with both feet at the same time.

When you master the 'Hand-on-Hand' you will be able to balance on posts or single objects of less than six inches diameter if need be - or on your partner's head if you have a team.

Place one hand on the floor, the other on top of it, lapping over in order to get as much area of the hands on the floor as possible as shown in Fig. 6, lean well forward and kick up to the vertical position. You will have to hit your balance at once as lateral stability is difficult. Have the fingers spread well apart, balance being maintained by their pressure.

Once you have done it well by kicking up practice by kicking up both feet together as mentioned at the top of this page. By springing up with both feet together you have less chance of falling to either side. The more flexible your shoulders the easier this balance.



"TIGER-BENDS" have always been the handbalancer's strength test just as chinning and dipping are to the gymnast. Tiger-bends take a combination of strength and co-ordination. I have seen many good handbalancers do 6 repetition Tiger-bends and there are a few that do from 10 to 12 while the record, to the best of my knowledge, is 17!

PLACE THE FOREARMS on the floor and kick-up into the forearm stand as shown in Fig. 7A on Page 10. Allow the legs to overbalance to such an extent that very little weight is felt on the elbows. (Examine Fig. 7B on Page 10). Note the extreme depth of the arch which is necessary to relieve the elbows of bodyweight. As soon as the overbalance has been accomplished quickly rock the entire body forward (Fig. 7C, solid lines to position 7C, dotted lines) until the forearms are nearly vertical and the body in much the same position as it would be when nearing the completion of the regular press-up handstand. Check the forward motion of the body and commence to press up as shown in Fig. 7D.

After you have successfully made the completed handstand drop down to the forearm stand again. This is relatively easy but make certain your elbows assume the same position (in relation to the distance between the elbows) then try a second Tiger-bend.

Here are a few pointers to remember; do not allow the arms to be flexed (bent) too much. The angle between the upper arm and the forearm should be as near as possible to the amount shown in Fig. 7B. If it is flexed too much you will encounter difficulty in the press-up. Rock forward until the forearms are nearly perpendicular to the floor (Fig. 7C, dotted lines) in order to press up quickly and with the least expenditure of strength. This is the secret of high repetition Tiger-bends. If you rock forward and at the same time allow too much bend at the elbows the chances are that your chin will come in contact with the floor.

A variation of the Tiger-bend which is rather simple is to perform it between two chairs or benches. This permits the head and shoulders to drop below the level of the hands and does not require such a deep arch.

THE "PLANCHE" is a handstand inasmuch as you are balancing your body on your hands. The straight arm planche is very very difficult and few balancers ever accomplish it correctly. Those whom I have seen do this feat have had powerful upper bodies and light legs. It is hard to say whether they got their development from doing the planche or that they could do the planche because of their unique build, nevertheless it is a wonderful strength developer requiring terrific shoulder power.

Page 10
THE "TIGER-BEND"

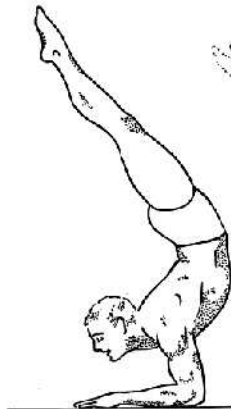


FIG 7A

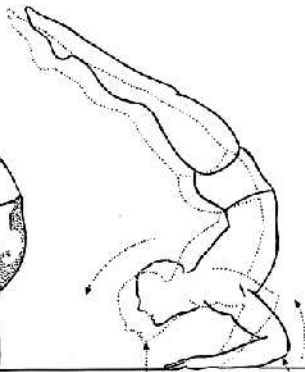


FIG 7C

FIG 7B

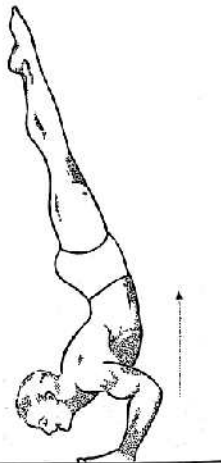


FIG 7D

YOUR FIRST ATTEMPT at the planche should be performed on the floor-bars with elbows bent. You will find that you can do a semblance of a planche with the floor-bars quite close together and by forcing the elbows tightly against the sides. This, of course, is not a true planche in any sense of the word, but; it will strengthen the necessary muscles in the lumbar region of the back and the shoulders. I suggest practicing with an exaggerated arch then gradually reducing the arch until the body is straight and horizontal to the floor. The amount of arch most suitable

for a beginner is shown in Fig.

8.

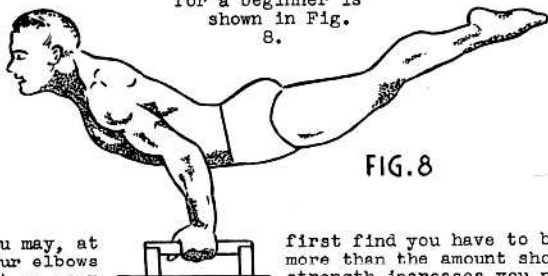


FIG. 8

You may, at your elbows but as your

less and less. As you progress try to depend less on the support offered by the elbows and with each succeeding attempt straighten the elbows more. I believe a barbell trained man can learn the planche quickly as he will have the required strength and this stunt takes more strength than any other.

first find you have to bend more than the amount shown strength increases you need

To do the planche from the floor as shown in Fig. 9, the

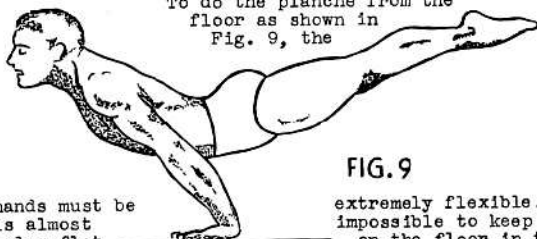


FIG. 9

hands must be is almost palms flat

plane. You will find you have to depend a great deal on finger strength. I have seen a chap perform a very

extremely flexible. It impossible to keep the on the floor in this

beautiful planche on his fists after he discovered he could not do it with hands flat on the floor; it takes more balance in this manner but it is worth a try.

IF YOU CAN DO the prone-up or hollow-back press-up as described on Page 7 of this Second Course you have a good chance of accomplishing the press-up from planche to handstand. Perform your planche as shown in Fig. 8 (Page 11) using the floor-bars, and without additional bending of the arms, force the legs as high as possible and at the same time lean forward and downward to counterbalance the legs. When your legs have passed the half-way mark (about a 45 degree angle) you should have no difficulty completing the handstand.

Dropping from the handstand into the planche is a neat maneuver and is excellent for testing your control. Come down slowly leaning well forward to prevent the feet from dropping too rapidly. If you have the strength you can do it.

A FEW VARIATIONS of the handstand will make you, in time, a far better balancer. It is a good idea to study the routine of the next hand-balancing team you see and pay particular attention to variation he or they may offer.

As an example of an interesting variation I saw some years ago; the balancer placed an ordinary kitchen chair on the tops of four beer bottles. A string was fastened to the two diagonally opposing each other. The performer pressed-up neatly into a chair handstand, (Shown on Page 2, Fig. 1). When he had secured his balance an assistant quickly pulled one of the beer bottles away thus leaving the chair balanced on only three bottles. After a bit of a flourish, the assistant pulled the other bottle away leaving the chair supported on two bottles. He received terrific applause for this variation of the simple chair stand. Once he had his balance it mattered little whether he had two, three or four bottles under the legs.

I recall another performer who did a handstand with his fingers placed on ten-pins. In other words he was balancing only on his finger tips. This in itself is difficult enough unless you are possessed of extremely strong fingers, but this balancer lifted his fingers, one at a time, off each pin, knocking them down in the process, until he was balancing only on his thumbs! To the best

of my knowledge only two handbalancers have succeeded in doing this incredible stunt.

I have seen many performers give variations of the handstand on rolling objects such as; wheels, balls, roller skates and even ice skates, however, each of these stunts were specialties of that particular performer and designed to create a spectacle. If you have mastered the kick-up, the press-up and several of the variants of these, you can, in a very short time, learn many of these professional balances. If you have a flare for originality you can create new ones yourself, otherwise, copy the best of some of your favorite professional performers.

THE "ONE-HAND-STAND"

BEFORE WE GO INTO one hand balancing I would like to touch on some beneficial exercises that will aid you in your work. If you are fortunate enough to possess a set of adjustable dumbbells or a barbell and have used either conscientiously the chances are you will be strong enough for any of the balancing stunts I have outlined in this course.

You should do plenty of repetition military presses both with your barbell and a pair of heavy dumbbells. I believe, however, that heavy dumbbells are more beneficial to handbalancers because of their difficulty of control in the overhead lifts. A man who is good at handling heavy dumbbells in the overhead exercises generally makes a better balancer.

When you get into 'hand-to-hand' work you will find that about eight presses with a pair of 75 pound dumbbells is the equivalent of a routine with a 150 pound top-mounter.

Floor dipping is an excellent free-hand exercise but is far more effective if some weight, such as a barbell plate, is placed across the back. As mentioned previously, strong wrists are a requisite of the handbalancer and every effort should be made to increase their strength. Wrist strength can be increased by use of the York Wrist Developer; a device that winds up a weight on a roller handle.

FOR EVERY 100 PERSONS who can perform a perfect handstand there is but one who can do a perfect one hand stand! I don't wish to seem overly pessimistic about this but from my experience it takes about one year to learn the one hand stand correctly. Of course, there will be many of you to whom balancing comes easy and you will achieve some sort of a one hand stand after only a few months practice. The one hand stand is the mark of the finished balancer and when you can do it gracefully and with complete confidence you are one of the chosen few.

The accepted method of learning the one hand stand is to go up, either press or kick, into your regular handstand and gradually lean over to one side until the opposite hand is not supporting any weight and can be lifted from the floor. It sounds simple enough.

The single hand on which you wish to balance must be chosen by trial and error. Since most of us are right-handed we will in all probability choose the right hand, however, by all means try some balances using the left hand. For a right-handed person the muscles on the left side of the body are stronger than those on the right! The muscles on the left side of the body do the work the right hand imposes. By that I mean; when you lift some heavy object with your right hand the muscles involved other than those of the right forearm are on the left side of the body. So you may find that you have far better balancing control by trying a one hand stand with the left hand, however, I only suggest this during the early stages of your practice, it will not take long to find which hand will serve you better.

THERE ARE TWO DIAGRAMS showing the position to strive for in learning the one hand stand (Fig. 10A and 10B, Page 15), pay particular attention to the front and side view. Notice that the balancer doesn't just lean to one side but more or less in the direction of the little finger of the hand on the floor. This direction is illustrated in Fig. 11. You will note that I said "more or less" for, like many other instances, I can't tell you the exact angle involved due to the many differences in height and physique but if you keep in mind the general direction in which to lean you will accomplish the one hand stand much more rapidly. Another thing; a time element must be taken into consideration and you should be able to hold a regular handstand for longer than 30 seconds before trying the one hander.

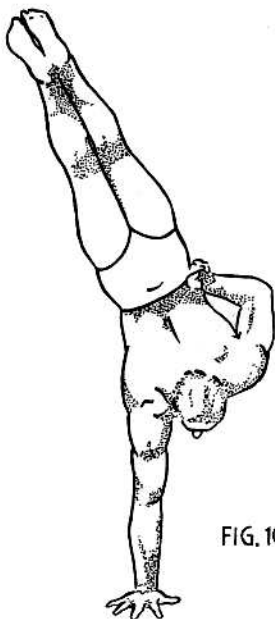


FIG. 10A

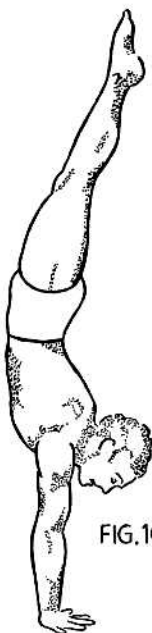


FIG. 10B

The above figures, 10A and 10B show the ultimate position in the one hand stand you should strive for. The free hand may be placed either on the hip or along the side, however, in the early stages of learning the one hander you use the free hand as an aid to balance. See Fig. 12C and D, Page 17.

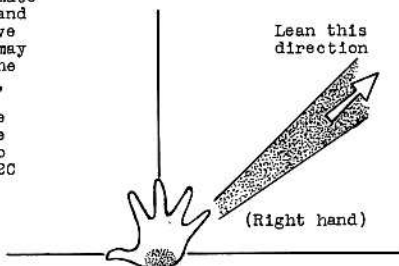


FIG. 11

LET US TAKE a step by step analysis of the orthodox method of learning the one hand stand. First; go up into your regular handstand (I suggest that you use the 'kick-up' in order to conserve energy) and securely lock the elbow of the arm to be used in the balance. (See Fig. 12A, Page 17). Now slowly and keeping complete control of your balance lean your weight over to the locked arm (Fig. 12B, Page 17) at the same time deepening the arch so that the feet move in the direction shown in Fig. 11 on Page 15. As you continue to lean in that direction you will have less and less weight on the opposite hand. Keep leaning until you can maintain a balance with only the finger-tips resting on the floor (Fig. 12C) then ever so carefully, lift the fingers free of the floor (Fig. 12D). Your initial try may net you a one hand balance of only a few seconds or only a fraction of the entire length of time taken for the movement (about 15 seconds in most cases) but with each successive try you will require less time in shifting your weight to the one hand and the result will be a far longer one hand stand.

ONE FAULT most beginners have when learning the one hand stand is; after carefully leaning to the one side and getting to the point where only the finger-tips touch the floor - they are in too much of a hurry to lift the entire arm. When you lift the free arm quickly you cannot compensate fast enough for the sudden change in the center of gravity and as a result - you fail to complete the one hander. Taking the proper time and care in lifting the free arm from the floor is the most important phase of the one hand stand!

During your early stages of learning use your free arm as a counterbalance and move it out to the side very carefully (Fig. 12D, Page 17) for you will find this extended arm an aid in maintaining a balance, however, when placed on the hip as in an expert one hand stand (Fig. 10A, Page 15) it is of no value as a counterbalance. When you have reached the stage of performing a balance as illustrated in Fig. 10A you maintain your equilibrium with finger-tip pressure just as you do in the regular handstand.

The above description explains the usual method of learning the one hander but I am going to give you a few suggestions that will speed up your progress.

THE ONE-HAND-STAND (Regular procedure)

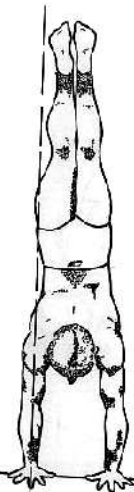


FIG 12A

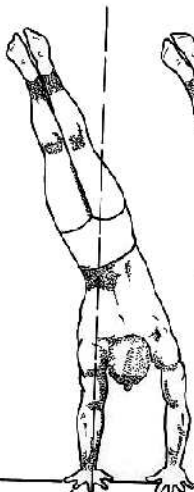


FIG 12B

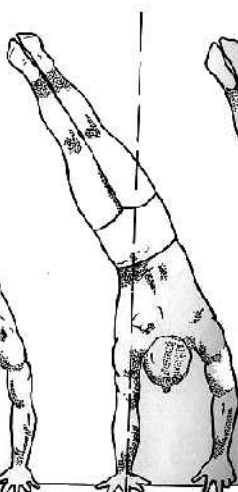


FIG 12C

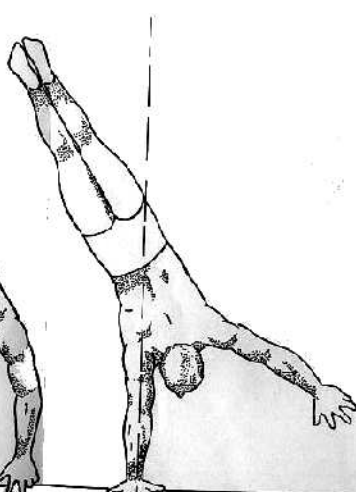
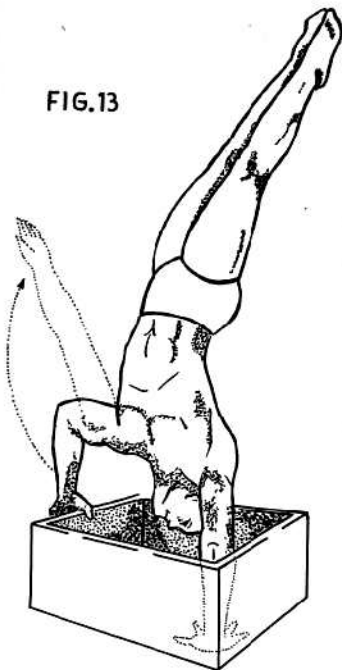


FIG 12D

GET A BOX such as an ordinary wooden soap or canned goods box, with sides about twelve inches high and place on the floor with open part up. Place the favored hand on the inside bottom of the box with forearm resting in the corner. (Fig. 13.).

FIG.13



Place the other hand on the opposite side of the box and kick-up or press-up into a handstand. (This balance will offer no difficulty if you have mastered the chair handstand mentioned on Page 2 of this Second Course). Your elbow or slightly below your elbow should now be wedged tightly in the corner of the box. Lean over in the direction of the one hand stand until you can let go of the side of the box with the other hand. Since your balancing arm is supported on two sides by the box you have only one direction in which to control your balance.

The use of a box as described will permit you to balance longer and you will better be able to study the amount of arch required to balance with a steady pressure on your finger-tips. The length of time required to learn the one hander should be cut in half by this method.

The same rule holds good for the one hand stand as the regular handstand; you should lean over just far enough that finger-tips against the floor will prevent falling. In the one hander, as in the regular, there is little or no control in the heel of the hand. Once you rock back on the heel of the hand you are 'underbalanced'. In the regular handstand this is corrected by slightly bending the elbows but in the one hand stand this is practically impossible for the novice.

THE ONE HANDER will come to you suddenly. It will come at such a time when you can always lean in the direction that additional leaning can be counteracted by finger-tip pressure alone. Of course, the amount of leeway in the one handstand is about ten times less than that of the regular handstand nevertheless, when you can feel the ever so slight 'Overbalance' and have sufficient finger strength to counteract it - you have mastered the one handstand.

Another good suggestion is to practice a few one handers holding a light dumbbell in the other hand. This will act as an excellent counterweight and will greatly simplify your control.

You will notice from the diagram that the legs are always shown held together. I have always maintained that it is far better to learn this way than by holding the legs apart and trying to gain additional control by waving the feet about in the air as I have seen many balancers do. When your legs are apart and moving you are continually altering the center of gravity and it will take far longer to learn a balance perfectly although early success may encourage you to try this method. Please don't do it; keep your legs together then you will always know where they are.

THE "ONE HAND PLANCHE"; for the benefit of the advanced equilibrist I will touch briefly on the one hand planche, the most difficult feat in handbalancing. The men who can do the planche with straight arm can be counted on the fingers of one hand! However, the planche with the arm bent and resting against the side is relatively simple.

First, try the bent arm planche on your floor-bar, as shown in Fig. 14, Page 20. You will notice that you need a slight twist to your body and the elbow is placed more against the abdomen than against the side. The real secret is to have a strong arch for your lower back muscles get a good workout when you try this. The opposite arm should be extended as a counter balance.

When practicing this bent arm planche on the floor extreme flexibility of the wrists is required. Keep the elbow as far down the abdomen as possible. This stunt can be performed easily when holding a dumbbell in the extended hand.

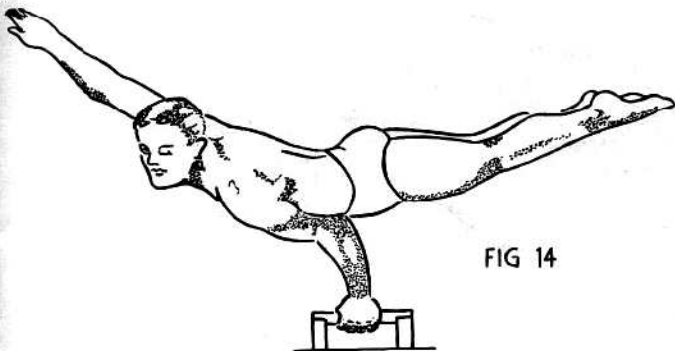


FIG 14

THERE HAS BEEN a number of men who have pressed-up into the one hand stand from the position shown in Fig. 14, and anyone accomplishing this feat is considered very extraordinary. I have had the pleasure of seeing it done a number of times but the men who did it always employed a slight kick with their legs in order to start the one hand press-up which is the most difficult part of the feat. The legs are bent then kicked upwards which frees the body momentarily from the elbow and the balancer forces his back into a deep arch, keeps his feet as high as possible, and presses. Should you ever accomplish this stunt you may well be proud of your arm strength and balancing ability.

To be able to lower yourself from the one hand stand to the planche that I have just described is a beautiful piece of co-ordination and control. The secret is not to come down into the planche too quickly but by strength of arm retard your downward drop and at the same time maintain complete control of your balance. You must lean in the direction of your head and shoulders and twist to the side at the same time.

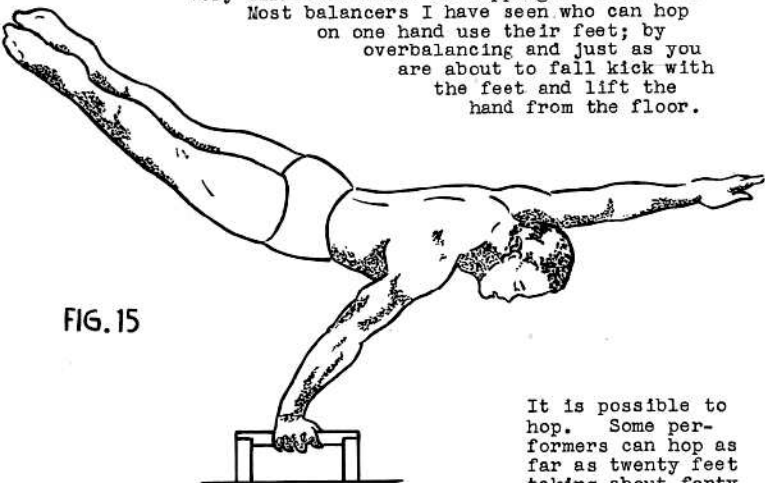
THE PLANCHE with arm straight, as I previously mentioned, is the most difficult feat in balancing. In my lifetime I have seen but one man perform it with hand on the floor. I do believe, however, that a number of equilibrists have succeeded on the floor-bar or a small pedestal. (See Fig. 15, Page 21).

THERE ARE TWO METHODS of performing the straight arm planche as shown in Fig. 15. The usual way is to place the hand on the floor-bar and lean over into, as near as possible, the finished position then do a slight kick-up into the balance. It is necessary to kick past the finished position as shown then lower down into it.

The other method is to execute your one hand stand and slowly drop into the position. This latter method requires terrific strength. One balancer I know of who does this planche on a small pedestal practiced by holding a weight in the opposite hand and gradually kept reducing the poundage used until he no longer required any.

If you have reached the point where you can maintain a one hander for over ten seconds you might try the very difficult stunt of hopping on one hand.

Most balancers I have seen who can hop on one hand use their feet; by overbalancing and just as you are about to fall kick with the feet and lift the hand from the floor.



It is possible to hop. Some performers can hop as far as twenty feet taking about forty hops!

If you succeed in hopping on one hand you might be able to do the one arm tiger-bend. Do the forearm stand using only one arm and co-ordinate your kick without lifting your elbow from the floor.

THE END